

*The Rest & Reward of Good Men at Death.*

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A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED at

*Peckham-Surry, Dec. II. 1748.*

Being the next LORD'S DAY after the  
Interment of that

*Eminent, Faithful, and Useful Minister*  
of JESUS CHRIST

*Dr. Isaac Watts.* *X*

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By JOHN MILNER, D. D.

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Mors terribilis est iis, quorum cum vita omnia extinguuntur ; non iis, quorum laus emori non potest.

*Cic. parad. 2.*

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The Rest & Reward of Good Men at Death

# SERMON

Preached at

Peckham-Swry, Dec. 11. 1748.

Being the next Lord's Day after the  
Interment of that  
Reverend, Faithful, and Upright Minister  
of Jesus Christ

Dr. Isaac Watts.

By JOHN MILLNER, D.D.

Notwithstanding all his, doctrine can give others ex-  
tinguished; and his doctrine has caused him  
to be called a

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TO

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_

S I R,

**A**FTER I had preached the Sermon, which accompanies this, I found it would be agreeable to you and some friends, if it was made more publick. As soon as I could gain a little leisure for transcribing, I was willing to oblige, with this testimony of my respect and veneration for the excellent person, whose death occasioned it. I now send it to you, to dispose of it just as you shall think proper.

Whilst Dr. Watts lived, he was an honour to the Dissenters. His uncommon genius, his polite taste, his pious and useful labours should endear his memory to those, who had the credit and benefit of them. A weak constitution confined him too often from appearing in active life ; yet this he compensated by his dili-

gence in the contemplative. He did not retreat to indolence and ease, under the favour of an honourable friendship; but fully employed himself in finishing those plans, he designed for the good of mankind. The number of his works published, and those he left behind him in manuscript, shew that he was diligent in his retirement, and animated in his compositions by generous and social affections. His works generally met with acceptance: as he wrote with ease and elegance, and could, from the richness of his imagination, enliven the most common subjects and add a lustre to the most interesting. His charity was very extensive to honest men in different Sentiments from himself. He firmly adhered to what he took to be truth, and as freely condemned error; but at the same time he was ready to make allowance for human weakness, and to consider the different sentiments among Christians, if they did not eclipse the distinguishing glories of our religion, and destroy its practical power and influence, I say, he could consider them, as monuments of our imperfection, and trials of our charity for one another.

Charity had taken a long and early possession of his Soul, where the soft and tender passions used to prevail. If by some rules of order, he fell in with, he was obliged to restrain his communion; yet it had no effect to confine his charity. - From his own trials, he  
was



was convinced of the many doubts and difficulties, which attend the most impartial enquiries after truth. " From my own experiment, " says he, I can easily guess what confounding " intricacies of thought others pass through in " their honest searches after truth. These con- " flicts did exceedingly enlarge my soul, and " stretched my Charity to a vast extent \*." He was sensible how much vital religion suffered by uncharitableness, and assigns this as one unhappy source of it, viz. " that a great part " of the professors of our holy religion, make " their heads the chief seat of it; and scarce " ever suffer it to descend and warm their " hearts. Jesus the saviour has been disco- " vered to them in a good degree of outward " light, but has never been revealed in them " with power, nor their souls changed by di- " vine grace into the image of the Gospel †." Towards the close of this piece, dissuading from the danger of so detested a vice, he expresses himself in the following affecting manner. " The uncharitable man wounds the " very vitals of that religion, by which he " hopes for eternal life: and whilst his fury " rages against his brother, for accidental " differences, he shakes the very foundations " of his own Christianity; and endangers or " prevents his own Salvation. His boasted " orthodoxy in opinion is made vain, while his " practical

\* Essay against uncharitableness. p. 12. Ed. 1707.

† Ibid p. 21.

“ practical ungodlinesses are so real, and his  
 “ faith appears to be little better, than that  
 “ of Devils, when he mingles so much of their  
 “ malice with it †.”

Such was Dr. Watt's Christian temper, so friendly, and catholick, that it disposed him to friendship with persons of different Denominations. Such were his abilities and labours, that he has acquired to his name a kind of immortality on Earth. His name will be mentioned with respect, whilst true vital religion preserves its authority amongst us; whilst liberty and the gospel shall be the honour of Great Britain. When we come to instruct our young friends at home, or to praise God in our publick assemblies, the name of this Excellent Man will be respected, who has furnished us with such agreeable helps for both: neither will his name or worth be unknown to the Schools of Philosophy.—But I must confine myself to the bounds of a letter, and have nothing more to add, but the esteem with which I am

Your

most Obedient

Humble Servant,

J. M.

REV. xiv. 13.

*And I heard a voice from heaven,  
saying unto me, write blessed are  
the dead, which die in the Lord,  
from henceforth, yea, saith the spi-  
rit, that they may rest from their  
labours, and their works do follow  
them.*

**T**HE *Moralist* tells us, that merely to live is not such a benefit, but to live well: that the true estimate of life is not to be taken from a flow of time, or a succession of so many years; but from our useful and virtuous actions<sup>a</sup>. To eat and drink and feel the vigour of every sense may be the life of a brute; but a rational creature must act rationally, or he cannot be said with any propriety to live.

Know-

<sup>a</sup> Non est bonum, vivere; sed bene vivere. *Sen.*  
Actu illam (sci vitam) metiamur, non tempore. *id.*  
Epist. 93.

Knowledge and virtue are undoubtedly the chief ornaments of human nature, and to be engaged in the pursuit of those, is an endeavour to carry it to its greatest improvement, and perfection. To come into the world for such an end, might well reconcile us to the infirmities and miseries, we are subject to here; and to go out of it with such a disposition would lead us to real happiness hereafter. To be useful then in our station; to be virtuous in our temper; and firmly attached to the interests of truth, liberty and religion; is the way to be happy, both in life and death.

What led my thoughts to this subject, was the death of a very worthy minister: a Master in our Israel, Dr. Isaac Watts, who was buried the last week.

“ He was possessed of many great talents, and valuable qualifications for the benefit of mankind. His light shined, and his influence spread to good advantage. He contributed much to the improvement of one part of Christian worship by his sacred and divine hymns; as he promoted the spirit of true vital religion by his practical works. He was happy in a lively imagination, and extensive knowledge, by which he was the more able to instruct and please. He was very solicitous to give an early bias to young minds towards religion, and for that end  
“ fur-



“ furnished them with some pleasing exer-  
 “ cises for their entertainment: for which  
 “ he had the thanks of many, whilst he  
 “ lived, and generations to come will rise  
 “ up, and call him blessed. He had such  
 “ a compassion for the honest prejudices of  
 “ mankind, that he thought it his duty to  
 “ soften them by every compliance, con-  
 “ sistent with truth and faithfulness: and  
 “ would even venture his credit and interest  
 “ with his friends, by endeavouring to ex-  
 “ plain what seemed harsh, difficult, and  
 “ dividing, in such a manner, as might unite  
 “ good men more cordially to one another.  
 “ His long and useful labours in the Chris-  
 “ tian Church, amidst the infirmities of a  
 “ breaking constitution, claim this publick  
 “ testimony of respect. The close of so  
 “ useful a life will be suitably attended with  
 “ a meditation on the rest and reward, which  
 “ good men enter upon at Death. *And I*  
 “ *heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me*  
 “ *write blessed are the dead, &c.*”

Some understand this passage to refer to  
 Martyrs and Confessors, and that those who  
 died *in* the Lord, were those who died *for* the  
 Lord <sup>b</sup>. Who gave up their lives for the

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Chris-

<sup>b</sup> *Ev* is sometimes rendered by *propter* for, or for the  
 sake of viz. They think they shall be heard *ἐν τῇ πολλῇ*  
*λογίᾳ* for their much speaking. Matt. vi. 7. — I there-  
 fore the prisoner *ἐν κυρίῳ* of, or for the Lord, for his sake.  
 Ephes. iv. 1. — If ye be reproached *ἐν ὀνόματι* for the  
 name of Christ, happy are ye. 1 Pet. iv. 14. But the more  
 usual construction is *in* and very well suits this passage.

Christian faith, and sealed it with their blood, the highest proof, because the most reluctant to nature, and interest, any one can give of their belief of its truth and importance.

'Tis very reasonable to suppose, and agreeable to the goodness and promise of God, that those who have extraordinary trials, should have extraordinary supports; that as their sufferings in Christ abounded, so should their consolations also abound<sup>c</sup>. Thus our Saviour assured his Disciples, that those who could forsake any worldly interests to serve him; or lose their lives to honour him, should find their advantage eminently in the next life<sup>d</sup>. But since the reward mentioned in the text is the common expectation of good men; since a life of virtue is a conflict with sense and passion, and a publick Station requires both labour and patience in the experience of all ages, I shall understand the words with such latitude, and therefore without farther preface or introduction, I observe in the words,

I. . . The Solemnity with which they are introduced. The images of this book are extraordinary and magnificent. And though we cannot explain the particular events of Providence designed in it; yet we see they must be important, as they are offered to us in so solemn a manner. Angels are brought into the scene; and the instruments both of  
 vengeance

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. i. 5.

<sup>d</sup> Matt. xvi. 25.

*of Good Men at death.* II

vengeance and mercy are so arrayed, as to strike the mind with awe. The narration proceeds with all the pomp and grandeur of language. The message here is uttered by a voice from heaven, that its authority might be unquestionable; it must stand upon record, as a firm and sure foundation of comfort; it is witnessed by the spirit, to give it a freer entrance and influence into the hearts of Believers: *I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me write, yea henceforth saith the spirit.* The stile is lofty, and the preparation solemn on purpose to draw our attention to it.

2. . . . You have a strange position laid down, *namely* that the dead are happy, *blessed are the dead.* How surprizing must this sound to us, who are so apt to over value life, and find the death of our friends, and the apprehension of our own death such a real source of grief. Men may possibly take a distast at life from the evils they meet with in it. In the hours of sadness they may with Job, wish for the grave. But generally, almost universally, it is otherwise. We cling about life, we part with it the last thing, and then with much reluctance. And yet here the dead are pronounced happy; to the surprize of nature indeed, but not of religion. You will however observe a limitation in the character of the happy

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dead:

dead: Not all that die are happy, only those *who die in the Lord*, i. e. all good men. To such, though death cannot appear amiable, from the opposition and reluctance of nature: yet neither will it appear dreadful, from the assurance and prospects of faith.

3.... You will observe the Blessedness itself expressed; *they rest from their labours and their works do follow them*. They will be placed for ever out of the reach of all that can be supposed to molest and vex them. They will be possessed for ever of all that can constitute a rational and virtuous happiness; and both be ascertained to them by covenant, as the reward of their patient and faithful services.

*Their works do follow them*. Some indeed go before them to heaven, as their earnest prayers for their friend's Salvation; some stay awhile behind them, to be the monuments of their worth and piety, and a treasure of comfort to the Church of God: but all will meet them in the other world, as the humble evidences of their faith, dependence and integrity.

I am led then from the words of my text to discourse briefly of these two things.

I.... The character here given of all good men; *they die in the Lord*.

II.... The nature of their future blessedness; *they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them*.

This



*of Good Men at death.* 13

This I hope will be a pleasing meditation to a christian, amidst the difficulties and conflicts to which he is now exposed. And methinks it should produce a secret regret in those, who have any reason to doubt of their own interest in it.

**I**. . . You have here the character of all good men; *they die in the Lord*, i. e. their temper and life has been such, and continues to be such to the last period, as is agreeable to the religion of Christ. Those that *die in the Lord* must first be *alive* in him, and they, that will be so much the objects of his love, must first be united to him in a covenant relation; must expect every favour according to the nature and design of this divine constitution. This is to make the gospel and religion of Christ a wise, excellent, and consistent scheme of mercy. But this being a case upon which so much depends, I beg leave to shew what it is *to be in Christ*: for they that are so, and continue to be so till death comes, they properly *die in the Lord*.

1. . . . The least that can be intended by our being in Christ *is the open profession of his religion*. That we acknowledge him as the Son of God, and Saviour of the World; believe his truths, rely upon his promises, and expect Salvation according to the terms  
of

## 14 *The rest and reward*

of acceptance in his Gospel, and, finally, perform the several offices of Religion in his name, and through his mediation. Such a profession of Christ before the world is what distinguishes the christian religion, from the jewish, or any other publick form. So much our Saviour reasonably expects from us, that we should *not be ashamed of him*, or his gospel before men <sup>f</sup>. And I must beg leave to observe, that this was thought of so much consequence, when Christ first introduced his religion into the world, the professing it in the face, and under the frowns of publick authority; in opposition to the prejudices of education, and the allurements of reputation and interest: I say in those circumstances, Christ thought fit to encourage such a profession by an act of indemnity and free pardon. They were declared freely justified by such a faith without works, as to *sins that are past*<sup>g</sup>; and this justification by faith only, St. Paul insists upon in opposition to justification by the deeds of the law. But then the case is vastly different as to those, who are *now* born in a Christian State, and under a publick profession of Christianity. There are not *now* the same encouragements wanting to introduce a religion, which is supposed to be already received and established. There are not the same reasons to induce us to believe, that  
an

<sup>f</sup> Mark viii. 38.      <sup>g</sup> Rom. iii. 25.

an open profession *now* is equally sincere, with *that* in former circumstances. The form and power of religion, we see, may be separated one from the other; and consequently that something further is necessary to the divine approbation, than mere faith or profession, even a temper formed upon the great principles of the Gospel. Our Saviour himself has decided the case, *not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven*<sup>h</sup>. A profession of religion can be no longer acceptable and just, than as it is accompanied with virtue, and productive of real holiness: which is indeed the end of all religion, under every dispensation of it. Wherefore

2. . . . To be in Christ *is to be in temper and life what his religion obliges us to be.* The great design of Christ's coming into the world must in all reason be the measure of our life and hope. By this we must regulate our thoughts; direct our course, and establish our comfort both in life and death. It is evident that Christ came to reveal God to us, and the way to eternal life. He came to give us just sentiments of God——as the supreme good; to be the noblest object of love and desire;——as the righteous governour of the world, whose kingdom is unalterably

<sup>h</sup> Mat. vii. 21.

## 16      *The rest and reward*

unalterably founded in truth and equity; to lead us to worship him with a pure mind, to imitate him in a course of virtuous actions; and, under all events, subscribe to his will——as highly offended with our sins; to convince us of the necessity of repentance, and a speedy return to our duty;——as willing to shew mercy to us through his Son; to engage us to rely upon his atonement and mediation. *To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved*<sup>i</sup>. This is the nature and design of the new covenant, and when such is the state and temper of our souls, we have then truly a covenant relation, and a covenant interest to rejoyce in. When the grace of God effectually teaches us, what it came to teach all men, *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world*<sup>k</sup>, then we are in Christ. And when sincerity animates all our endeavours to do the will of God, i. e. when we endeavour it, with a true intention to please and honour Him, with the conscious approbation of our own minds, that we are doing what is right; and with good affections of soul, we are then fully in Christ.

All this was the end of Christ's coming into the world, and we cannot with any propriety believe that we are in him, untill the main thing is secured, for which he  
was

<sup>i</sup> Eph. i. 6.      <sup>k</sup> Tit. ii. 12.



was manifested. He was manifested to take away sin<sup>1</sup>, and therefore we cannot be in him, whilst we love and live in sin. He came to destroy the works of the Devil<sup>m</sup>, and therefore we cannot be his, whilst we uphold those works. *The fruits of his Spirit are in all righteousness goodness and truth<sup>n</sup>*; and therefore it cannot be supposed, that we have his Spirit, so long as we are impure, vicious, enemies to truth and goodness, *now those that have not the spirit of Christ are none of his<sup>o</sup>*.

Those are self evident propositions, and shew it to be as well the height of folly, as of impiety, to pretend to religion, without, being really religious. Folly to deceive ourselves by a zealous profession; by a punctual compliance with the externals of religion; or a purpose of future amendment, whilst the heart remains unsanctified. Folly to act a wrong part, when the same care, the same zeal, with the grace of God, would acquire the amiable virtues, and everlasting comforts of religion. The word of God is clear enough in those points. *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God<sup>p</sup>*. It is an everlasting truth, that *they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts<sup>q</sup>*. And therefore we can avail ourselves of no

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<sup>1</sup> John i. 29.    <sup>r</sup> John iii. 5.    <sup>m</sup> I John iii. 8.  
<sup>n</sup> Eph. v. 9.    <sup>o</sup> Rom. viii. 9.    <sup>p</sup> I Cor. vii.  
19.    <sup>q</sup> Gal. v. 24.

## 18      *The rest and reward*

profession of Christ's name and religion, but what becomes at the same time an effectual obligation to the practice of holiness.

3.... To be in Christ is not only to become virtuous and good for a season; *but to continue so to the end of life.* How is it possible to die in the Lord, if we do not persevere in the same profession and practice, which shews us to be at all in him? This is frequently commanded as a duty, and we shall find it a duty, which requires all our attention and care. *Be ye therefore ready, for the son of man cometh in an hour, that ye think not<sup>r</sup>. Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you unawares<sup>s</sup>. Take heed lest there be in any of you, an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. Exhort one another, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our Confidence stedfast unto the end<sup>t</sup>. Fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it<sup>u</sup>. If any man draw back, my Soul shall have no pleasure in him<sup>v</sup>. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life<sup>w</sup>.* All those passages demon-

<sup>r</sup> Luke xii. 35.

<sup>s</sup> Luke xxi. 34.

<sup>t</sup> Heb.

iii. 12, 13, 14.

<sup>u</sup> Heb. iv. 1.

<sup>v</sup> Heb.

x. 38.

<sup>w</sup> Rev. ii. 10.

monstrate the duty of perseverance and constancy in religion. And let me add, that whilst we are thus endeavouring, we have every encouragement to support us. God has promised *never to leave or forsake those*, who come up to the Character of his people<sup>y</sup>. He will assist them in their trials; refresh them in their sorrows, and render them impregnable against the efforts of all their enemies. Not the malice of men, not the powers of death and hell shall be able to frustrate their hopes, or hinder their salvation. *None shall pluck them out of God's hand*<sup>z</sup>, which is omnipotent; or out of God's covenant, *which is sure*<sup>a</sup>. This is the power of our conquest, *that greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world*<sup>b</sup>: this the security of our steadfastness, *that we are kept by the power of God, through faith unto Salvation*<sup>c</sup>, i. e. in the character of true believers we may assure ourselves of preservation from every danger, till we are finally and forever secured in the blessedness of heaven. How glorious are those encouragements? And what weakness must we be guilty of, to desert those characters, with which the promises of God are unalterably connected. We must therefore hold fast the beginning of our confidence, firm unto the end, *for he that endureth to the end shall be saved*<sup>d</sup>. If we bear the heat of the day,

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and

<sup>y</sup> Heb. xiii. 5.    <sup>z</sup> John x. 29.    <sup>a</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.  
<sup>b</sup> 1 John iv. 4.    <sup>c</sup> 1 Pet. i. 5.    <sup>d</sup> Matt. xxiv. 13.

and tire before the evening ; if we run well and do not run on ; if we begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh it cannot be expected that we should *die in the Lord*. We must therefore *be stedfast and immoveable* : and indeed all the mighty reasons, which prove the excellency and importance of religion, equally enforce our continuance in it.

Those things then enter into the character of a good Christian ; of him *that dies in the Lord*, an honest, open profession of his religion ; a real conformity to the design of it in life ; and a persisting in this good temper till death shall put an end to our warfare. Such a course of piety will be attended with the noblest pleasures here : but my text leads me to consider

**II.**.... *The nature and greatness of the future blessedness, which is designed as the reward of good men. They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.* The description is full, and the prospect charming. To quit the fatigues and labours of the day, for such a calm evening ; to escape from the threatening rocks, or driving Storm, and retreat to a secure haven ; to exchange the fatigues and toils of war, for the everlasting fruits of victory and peace. How desirable ! How delightful ! And thus is heaven represented, a rest, a port, a crown. We have



*of Good Men at death.* 21

have here the future reward of good men expressed.

1.... By a freedom from all evil, *they rest from their labours.*

2.... By the possession of all good, *and their works do follow them.*

The consideration of both those heads will give us a just idea of the reward; and perhaps the best that can be formed by us in our present state.

FIRST... Those that dye in the Lord will be *freed from those evils, which now ruffle and molest them.* What we call happiness here must be imperfectly such, because blended with many evils, which often spoil the relish of it. Death, *said old Cato*, is making land, and entering the port after a long and tedious navigation<sup>f</sup>: So dying to a Christian will be finishing the dangerous voyage of life. By this happy event good men will be released from two afflicting labours, *viz. of*

*Sin and Suffering.*

1... *Sin*, which a good man views in a different light from others. What they find a pleasure; he feels a burthen: what they love, is the object of his fear. And well he might be affected thus, when he has a truer apprehension of its evil nature. He  
feels

<sup>f</sup> Quo proprius ad mortem accedam, quasi terram videre videar, aliquandoque in portum ex longa navigatione esse venturus. *Cic. cato maj. 19.*

sees it to be a transgression of law ; a violation of order, peace and rectitude, which God designed. It grieves a good man that he should be so liable to it, that he should find such inconstancy in his course, such abatements to his zeal, so many fogs and clouds arise to intercept the views of faith. Paul was an eminent Christian, yet notwithstanding all his improvements and raptures, he could not look into himself, without a pang of sorrow, *Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

How much is it the complaint of Believers, that they have so many temptations without ; so many corruptions within, which retard their progress to heaven ? How much do they grieve, that they cannot serve God, equal to their love ; nor love him, equal to their desires ; nor desire him, suitable to his excellence ?

Death will remove from this imperfect world ; death will put an end to this painful conflict, and open a passage into a state of perfect rectitude and love. *There the spirits of just men are made perfect*<sup>h</sup>. No unbelieving thought, no criminal desire will rise up in the Soul there, to defile it ; no temptation, to surprize, or endanger it. Death will do for them, what afflictions could not do, what prayers and ordinances could not do,

<sup>s</sup> Rom. vii. 24.

<sup>h</sup> Heb. xii. 23.

do, free them from every sinful stain and blemish; from every imperfection and fear. How will their graces shine, and their joy abound when they shall quit this sinning world; when they shall take their final adieu of defilement and delusion? Then no more the pensive hour; the weeping prayer; the mournful review; but virtue and love will be still soaring to nobler heights, and receiving new vigour from the eternal source of life and love. Such a blessedness, and such an heaven must be highly valued by all, who desire *to walk before God with a perfect heart.*

2.... Death will remove the good man from the labours of *suffering*. *We are born to trouble*<sup>i</sup>, as our surest inheritance; and generally have such an experience of it before we leave the world, as to make a change desirable. Thus it pleases God to train us up for virtue and heaven by a succession of disappointments; thus would he render the objects of faith the more important and valuable. When we come into the world, weeping is the first presage of our misery; and our first knowledge of things very often begins with a sense of our own misfortunes. Such a condition of being at present is thought best for us by our alwise Creator; a mixture of good and evil, by which the passions of joy and sorrow will be alternately raised, and which,

<sup>i</sup> Job v. 7.

which, without great caution, will become impediments to that good we might otherwise attain. Should our joy become extravagant it would throw us into an habitual levity and impotence of mind; into such a temper as would prevent all great designs, all manly and noble pursuits, which require attention, patience and zeal. On the other hand indulged sorrow will dissipate the vigour of the mind; introduce such a discomposure, as will spoil the relishes of life, and unfit us for the most necessary duties. Some occasions of sorrow will be very impressive, such as,—persecution for the testimony of truth and a good conscience;—slander for the firmness of our integrity, or the extension of our charity;—the desertion of friends, and the defection of our children from true wisdom and virtue. Those occasions of sorrow will be painful, and deeply wound, where the mind is actuated by the fear of God and generous affections; by a love of truth and mankind.

It is the business of reason and religion to prevent the excess of our passions; but they are many times too strong for us. Their rise is often sudden, and their course impetuous, and we are borne away. But if the considerations of religion do not immediately check the torrent, they suggest what will support us as to the issue. That though the day be dark and lowering, the evening will

be



be calm; though the storm falls heavy the shelter is near at hand. *Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him<sup>k</sup>.* Whilst such love God and endeavour to be like him, they are the objects of his favour. They will not therefore always lie in a sordid suffering condition. Those labours shall have their period. The grave shall cure all their maladies; and an absolute rest and ease spring out of this corruption. *There the wicked cease from troubling, there the weary is at rest<sup>l</sup>.*

No more shall the righteous soul be vexed and distressed by the sins of others; or sink into the fainting fits of creature love—No more feel the envenomed stings of envy, slander and penal laws.—No more be fatigued with the labours of study, or deceived and perplexed in the pursuits of knowledge. Death will close those dubious and distressing scenes, and leave them in a condition where there will not be the least appearance of grief and suffering. Blessed hope! Afflictions cannot keep us out of heaven; nor will afflictions go with us there. Happy condition! *Where God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, where there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away<sup>m</sup>.*—But this is not all the notion of future blessedness, for

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SECOND-

Isa. iii. 10.

<sup>l</sup> Job iii. 17,

<sup>m</sup> Rev. xxi. 4.

SECONDLY.... It contains the possession of all good, *and their works do follow them.* By which I conceive we are to understand two things.

*Their virtuous temper,  
And the reward of it.*

1.... Their works do follow them, or, as the words may be rendered<sup>n</sup>, do *accompany* them, *i. e.* Those gracious dispositions, which they acquire now, will go with them to heaven, there to be improved and perfected. As mens moral state is at death, such will be the character of their eternal state. Those, who die in their sins, will retain their vicious tempers, and necessarily feel them a perpetual source of torment: as others habituated to virtue and goodness will find in themselves a spring of comfort, and a disposition for happiness. The one will be attended with the pains of a self accusing mind: the other with the pleasing reflections of conscious innocence. This must in a degree necessary result from the nature of things, and cannot be altered by any power whatever. Was this better considered, it would not be in the power of designing men to deceive and impose upon their fellow creatures, in persuading them that the belonging to any Church; or the observance of any Externals in religion: or the belief of any Creed would

answer

<sup>n</sup> 'Ακολουθέω *sequor*; ex a (i. e. ἀμα simul) et κέλευθος *via*—*comitor*; sequente praepositione μετὰ cum. Et eorum opera eos comitantur. Pafor. Lex. N. T.

answer the design of religion, and deserve their principal care and zeal. By such wrong views bigotry and superstition have been nursed up in all ages, and rational creatures led to imagine, that there is righteousness and piety in those things, which have nothing to do with it. The truth is, there must be an inward holy change wrought upon the soul. There must be a pious and virtuous mind; pure and holy affections produced in us, or it will be impossible in any circumstances, or in any relations whatever, to be happy. Good men then will go into the other world with a right temper of soul, and throughout eternity find their pleasure increase in pursuing more exalted measures of it. And let me say, as we improve in this, we approach nearer to the image and perfection of God himself. What an happiness must this be, when the rectitude and innocence of primitive nature will be restored; when the pursuits of knowledge will be without weariness or interruption; when glory will be an expansion of the same divine grace, we received here; and the pleasures of heaven result from improved measures of the same knowledge, love and virtue that we experienced below? Thus may we begin our heaven on earth, and continue it throughout eternity, by growing in holiness. *The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more, unto the perfect day.* It sheddeth a comfortable influence on all around



it, and is both the light and lustre of every character, in both worlds.

2.... Their works do follow them *to be rewarded*. This reward, I conceive, will result not only from the nature and reasons of things; but from the favour and bounty of God: from the free derivations of good, from the inexhausted spring and fountain of all goodness. A reward due not from any title of merit, but of grace. Their works do not go before with any assuming airs; but follow them with the humble claim of promise. The Saviour in his gospel has expressly offered this ample encouragement; and good men may therefore warrantably make it the object of their desire and hope. *Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they might have a right to the tree of life<sup>1</sup>. And again, behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man as his work shall be<sup>2</sup>.* A reward suited to the quality of the work; and enlarged according to the measure of integrity, usefulness and difficulty, which attended it: but at the same time infinitely beyond all proportion of our desert. It pre-emptorily excludes every notion of merit, such is its transcendant excellency and greatness. Its greatness surmounts all the proportions of virtue, and really is, what it is said to be, *a reward of Grace*. This is one main thing, which the gospel would inculcate,  
the

Rev. xxii. 14.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxii. 12.



the obligation we are under to the mercy of God, in assuring the forgiveness of repented Sin, and offering to us Salvation through the merits of his Son. *The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord*. But then, though the reward is so great as to exceed all desert, yet it is offered in such a way as to be consistent with the moral nature and government of God. The gospel, that offers it, does, at the same time and in the strongest terms, establish the necessity and perpetual obligation of personal holiness. So that it is not to be looked upon as an arbitrary unconditionate offer of grace; but an extraordinary motive to our conformity to the law and will of God; and which will be considered and appealed to in the retributions of the last day. And O how boundless must that reward be, which contains every ingredient of happiness, and in such fulness, as to exceed description by all the force of language, or power of imagination. *Neither eye, nor ear, nor heart can conceive the things, which God hath prepared for those that love him*<sup>†</sup>.

When I consider this blessedness *subjectively*, as resulting from new methods of knowing, acting, and enjoying, how great must it be! The operations of the Soul will be more perfect, when it is enlarged from this prison; when it is freed from this incumbrance of flesh;

<sup>†</sup> Rom. vi. 23.

<sup>‡</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 9.

flesh; when it is got above the region of mists and shadows. With what force and vigour will reason act; and with what brightness and order the understanding represent the evidences of things. How must the will, delivered from the partiality of sense, and the terror of fear, freely imbrace truth and goodness. In heaven the passions will be all regular, and the desires all reasonable, amidst the attractions of noble and divine objects. How much does the man differ from himself in this world, that is converted from sin and sensuality to God? How different in his apprehension, in his reasonings, in his desires and choices? This holy change has introduced *a good understanding*; a submissive will; and a better heart. If such a change here may be called the excellence of wisdom, the perfection of beauty, the dignity of human nature; how much will those advantages be all increased in a state separate from the infirmities of flesh, and the incumbrances of mortality? Happy state indeed! When the capacities of the Soul will be enlarged, and its operations lively and regular; and no longer entangled by those interests and pleasures, which depend upon the life of the body. Nay at the resurrection, when the body itself will be reclaimed from the grave, it will be changed in its qualities to render it more accommodate to the nature and operation of the

of Good Men at death. 31

the enlarged mind. Its corruptible, dishonourable, infirm, and heavy accidents will become spiritual, active, glorious and immortal<sup>a</sup>. What a noble creature will man appear then; dignified and improved in all his faculties with a new glory? Yet after all, *it does not appear fully what we shall be, but we know, that when Christ shall appear, our vile bodies will be changed* into a resemblance of his divine lustre<sup>w</sup>; and our souls improved into the *image* of his perfect righteousness, by which only we are capable of seeing, or enjoying, *him as he is*. Don't forget, *Christians*, the inference, which the Apostle immediately subjoins. that our present duty is to begin this happiness on earth, by an imitation of Christ in purity and virtue: *for every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure<sup>x</sup>*.

When I consider this blessedness *objectively*, how much am I at a loss to comprehend or express it? The supreme good is now possessed, the object to which the Christian continually aspired. He beholds him in a near view, not as formerly with a transient glimps. He embraces him with the utmost stretch of love, and finds nothing to divide the heart, or cool the holy devout flame. He has now free and full communications from this fountain of light and joy, without inter-

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43, 44.  
<sup>x</sup> 1 John iii. 2, 3.

<sup>w</sup> Phil. iii. 21.



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interruption. But who can tell the satisfaction, the vigour, gratitude and admiration which result from this presence, when *God will be all in all*<sup>y</sup>. Jesus the tender lover of souls is now seen and enjoyed; and till it comes to this, the believer cannot be at rest. To this he aspires, for this he prays and longs. It is a delightful part of his duty on Earth to be a *follower of the Lamb*<sup>z</sup>; and sweetly commune with him in ordinances. It is a glorious part of his heaven to *be ever with the Lord*<sup>a</sup>; to *admire him with his Saints, and glorify him with those that believed*<sup>b</sup>. — What shall I say of the *blessed society* above, all benevolent and sincere: Of the friendship of Angels; of the fellowship of Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs. — What of the *blessed work* there; where love is the theme, and love the power of attempting it; where admiration breaks forth into joyous hymns, and exalts the harmony to a rapture. — What shall I say of the *blessed place*, which glory surrounds, which glory fills; glory infinitely surpassing all the magnificence, and tinsel pomp of thrones. Think upon the comforts of friendship, the pleasures of philosophy, and the joys of religion: think upon all that is great and good, Heaven is that, and infinitely more. For who can describe that blessedness, which an infinite

<sup>y</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 28.

<sup>z</sup> Rev. xiv. 4.

<sup>a</sup> 1 Thess.

iv. 17.

<sup>b</sup> 2 Thess. i. 10.



infinite Good communicates, and eternity measures. The best way to know what heaven is, is to labour in good earnest to get there.

— Thus I have endeavoured to give you some idea of this future blessedness; and such as it is, we see it worth a living, and dying for. I come

**III.** . . . To consider the *improvement* we ought to make of this Subject. And methinks there is no one who acknowledges himself a dying creature, but would be glad to receive the comfort of this doctrine. Consider, I beseech you *then*, some important truths connected with the subject, the future blessedness of good men; the unspeakable reward of their patience and constancy.

I. . . . This would excite the caution of good Christians, not to think themselves happy in the most prosperous and flattering circumstances here. It seemed best to the wise author of our beings to put a mixture of good and evil into our present condition: and sin, by his permission, has introduced a like mixture into our present natures: fully experienced, I apprehend, in the disproportion between the strength of our animal and rational powers. His intention, in such a state of things, is to prove us, and discover our value for reason, truth, and virtue, in which lies the path of life. And, upon the whole, that finding imperfection, dissatisfaction, and

### 34. *The rest and reward*

want of compleat happiness in every situation we might be led to seek it in himself, and in the next life, *where his presence has a fulness of joy, and his right hand everlasting pleasures to bestow on all good men*<sup>c</sup>. Remember then, O Christian, that happiness, equal to thy capacity and desires, is not to be found in this world. *This is not your rest, because it is polluted*<sup>d</sup>: polluted with sin, polluted with affliction. Let not *then* your present prosperity deceive you, with its flattering scenes, and gay variety. This is a dangerous state to virtue, without caution and fear. It has many powerful temptations to pride and sensuality; to sloth and indolence, from which proceed darkness and neglect of our spiritual affairs. When thy circumstances are easy, take care of flattering hopes, and creature dependencies: fear lest thou fall into security, and think it good to be here. True happiness is distant and future. It lies not on this, but the other side of death. We must die before we can be happy. “ *Croesus* once sent for *Solon*. At the first interview he presented himself to the Philosopher in all his pomp and royal state. He commanded that he should be shewn his immense treasures, and then asked him, whom he thought to be the happy man. *Solon* named some excellent persons that were dead. The King missing

<sup>c</sup> Psal. xvi. 11.

<sup>d</sup> Mic. ii. 10.

“ the compliment to himself, asked directly  
 “ what he thought of him, possessed of so  
 “ much dignity and power. He replied,  
 “ that observing the varieties of human life,  
 “ and the numerous misfortunes, which at-  
 “ tended every condition; he could not ad-  
 “ mire any man’s happiness that may change,  
 “ and therefore could not pronounce him  
 “ happy, before he was dead<sup>e</sup>.” We have  
 still more reason to say so, to whom *life*  
*and immortality are brought to light*<sup>f</sup>. We  
 may have many comforts to rejoice in; ma-  
 ny pleasing prospects and hopes to revive us:  
 but those are not Christ and heaven. I will  
 wait therefore in faith and patience, till my  
 change comes: till death open to me a pas-  
 sage to an happiness that will be perfect and  
 unchangeable.

2. . . . This doctrine should support the  
 afflicted righteous, and embolden them in  
 the last conflicts of nature. Whatever our  
 disappointments and sufferings are, we have  
 considerations proper to alleviate our pain,  
 and stifle all undue resentments. “ This  
 “ condition of being, appointed to me, is  
 “ not the effect of my own choice, but of  
 “ his who has a right to dispose of me,  
 “ and fix the bounds of my *habitation* with  
 “ a wider or narrower limit<sup>g</sup>: and should  
 “ I desert my station or my duty? No; let

E 2

“ me

<sup>e</sup> Plutarch in vit. Solon.

<sup>g</sup> Acts xvii. 16.

<sup>f</sup> 2 Tim. i. 10.

“ me act worthy my rational nature ; my  
 “ Christian profession and hopes. By wisdom, by patience and submission ; by an  
 “ inviolable integrity let me shew myself superior to all difficulties. Shew that I am  
 “ not disappointed by those disagreeable incidents ; that I think my existence here,  
 “ but a short part of my duration ; and *am*  
 “ *looking and waiting for the blessed hope*<sup>h</sup>. I  
 “ will still persevere, by the grace of God,  
 “ in well doing, in this confidence, that  
 “ *there remaineth a rest for the people of God*<sup>i</sup>.”

When this is the case, we should not call that intolerable which cannot be long : nor sink under a burden that will shortly be taken off our shoulders. Heaven will make amends for all our labours. Happiness will enlarge there in proportion to our constant virtue and submission. Should death present itself to us in its dreadful forms, we should not be dismayed, or decline the thoughts or view of it. Is not this *the end of all men*<sup>k</sup>. Could indeed our not thinking of it secure us against the event itself ; could our negligence about it prevent the inevitable stroke, there might be some excuse for ourselves. But whether we think of it or not, death will come. The experience of all mankind proves this. *Our Fathers where are they, and the Prophets do they live forever*<sup>l</sup> ? Not that  
 I think,

<sup>h</sup> Tit. ii. 13.

<sup>i</sup> Heb. iv. 9.

<sup>k</sup> Eccles. vii. 2.

<sup>l</sup> Zechar. i. 5.



I think, our submission should arise merely from the unavoidableness of it; but from its being the wise appointment of our Creator, who knows best how and when to dispose of his creatures. In this view our submission will be a virtue; an acknowledgement of God in all his ways. The Believer will look further than sense, and consider the end or rather beginning of life. Death is an enemy; but tis the last; tis a conquered enemy. The Captain of our salvation has violated his prison, broken his chains, and will rescue all his friends from this captivity. An enemy did I call death, it is a friend, that discharges us from labour; that hides us from the stroke of present or future evils; a friend that is come to undress us, (though sometimes with a rude hand) and prepare us for robes of light. Why then should we be afraid of death? If Christ is ours, death will be ours, for death is in the covenant and will be sanctified to every Believer. *Whether life or death, things present or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's<sup>m</sup>.*

3. . . . This thought should reconcile us to the death of our friends of the most amiable and useful character. Bless God that such were ever given to guide us with their light, and encourage us with their example. Remember with gratitude the benefit we received either from their counsels, or their prayers:

<sup>m</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 22.

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prayers: but dont grudge their happiness. Imitate their virtue; admire their constancy, and pronounce them happy, who died upon the same good principle they lived. *Those all died in faith*<sup>a</sup>. Then faith triumphs, when it closes the scenes, and yields to nothing but visions of glory. But is it not reasonable, that those who have borne the heat of the day, should rest in evening. That those who have served in a long warfare and conquered, should go to receive their crown? In the pursuit of Truth here we many times stumble upon error: and find some part of the charming object either too deep or too sublime for our short line to reach: such is Deity. How often have we been forced to own our eye too dim, our conceptions too narrow, our medium too gross to trace out the incomprehensible, the infinite unknown. And shall we envy those who have got new methods of knowledge and reasoning? they look not now through the obscure telescopes of sense, but near and in a distinct light: *face to face*. They have now no more a partial view of objects, which so often misguides the judgment; but comprehend and grasp the whole: *They know even as they are known*<sup>o</sup>. Blessed are those that died in the Lord, who now lie at the fountain head of Truth, and see clearly through all the difficulties of Providence,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. xi. 13.

<sup>o</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

dence, the philosophy of nature, and the mysteries of Grace. Their death may be our loss; but it is their gain; and instead of mourning their fate, we have abundant reason to congratulate their escape to light and liberty.

4. . . . If those only are blessed who *die in the Lord*; what must be their case, *who die in their sins*? Those are quite opposite characters, and must certainly have a different tendency and end. The one will find mighty supports in the last conflict: the other lose all dependence and hope. The one will terminate in blessedness: the other in misery. And who can sufficiently deplore the amazing ruin? A ruin that will necessarily spring out of their own vicious tempers from self reflection and self condemnation; which alone may be severe enough to make a hot and dreadful hell. When such recollect how they have acted contrary to the law of their nature; contrary to the dictates of religion, the checks of conscience, and the frequent restraints of shame and fear: when such remember the unfruitful works of darkness; the loss of all their pleasures, and stand dismayed at the dread, and darkness of futurity, how keen must every reflection be; and what the effect, but dissatisfaction, regret, self upbraiding, and wild despair?—But this is not all. *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all*

*all unrighteousness of men*<sup>p</sup>. As a moral governor, God has given us laws to be obeyed; as a merciful Creator he has sent his son to declare and enforce them, by the most interesting motives: and is it not fit and reasonable that God should call men to an account, and, in consequence, deal with them according to their real moral character, otherwise government would be an insignificant thing. Now how dreadful is the portion allotted to such as *die in their sins*: namely, *everlasting destruction from the anger of the Lord, and the glory of his Power*. Those who live under the Gospel, without being the better for it; who persist in their wickedness; notwithstanding its light and grace; and die as impenitent and incorrigible as they lived: all such are declared out of covenant, and out of Christ. They have nothing to expect, *but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries of God*<sup>q</sup>. That we might not think lightly of this ruin, it is expressed by things, which give the most exquisite pain as a *gnawing worm, a burning and active fire*: by things, which strike the mind with the utmost horror, as darkness, plagues, blasphemy, and the second death, a death, which has all the pain, without the power of dying.—  
Is it wise then to run such a desperate risk as this?

Rom. i. 18.  
Mark ix. 44.

<sup>q</sup> 1 Theſ. i. 9. Heb. x. 27.



his ? Is it rational to corrupt and abuse a very short part of our duration, and thereby render all the rest miserable ? Life is but a span that will soon be measured over : but immortality, eternity, how it extends beyond the reach of imagination ! Will all the pleasures of sin countervail such a ruin ? Will all the gaiety and mirth of a licentious life be an equivalent for the loss of heaven ? I wish the intemperate and vicious part of mankind would think of these things, whilst thinking would be of any advantage. Would they be willing *their bones, full of the sin of their youth, should lie down with them in the dust* ? Would they be pleased to have their sins follow them into the other world, to testify against them in the last day. If not, the only way to avoid this, is by a sincere repentance and amendment of their ways. If after all we pay little or no regard to God's *command* in this affair<sup>t</sup> ; yet the thing is reasonable in itself. Reasonable, that we should undo, what we have done amiss ; reasonable, that we should review a wrong conduct with an ingenious remorse, and self abhorrence ; reasonable, to consider every vice as a deviation from truth, rectitude and happiness. And if repentance appears reasonable, it must be necessary before we leave our state of trial. And to defer this, from a delusive purpose of repenting before we die, is madly to chuse both our sin and suffering ; to be pleas-

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ed

<sup>t</sup> Job. xx. 11.

<sup>t</sup> Acts xvii. 30, 31.

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ed with sin now, and to be willing to afflict our souls for it hereafter. But in reason, and in the language of Scripture, *now is the time, now the accepted time; and the day of salvation*<sup>2</sup>.

5. . . . And lastly. The general exhortation from hence is to live well; because there is no dying well without it: no dying with comfort and safety. What God commands, and for which he will reward, is no other than a direct pursuit of our own interest. The course of virtue, which he points out, is excellent and amiable. It amounts to this, the right use of our reason, and regulating every spring of action by its law and influence. Vice on the contrary is a deviation from reason, and acting by the motives of Sense and passion without reason, or in opposition to it. The one is an excellence, the other a deformity; the one is truth and liberty, the other error and a base servitude; the one *finally*, tends to our perfection and happiness, the other to our debasement and ruin. In all this, nothing is required, but what becomes us, and nothing produced, but what improves us, *viz.* inward security and peace. Tis from the right use of our powers, and maintaining a due subordination between them, that result all those virtues, which are the honours of our nature and religion. *For he that in those things, namely, righteousness, peace and joy in the*  
Holy

*of Good Men at death.* 43

Holy Ghost, *serveth Christ, is acceptable to God and approved of men*<sup>w</sup>. The whole frame of our Saviour's religion was designed to explain and enforce moral obligations. For this he lived and died, for this he offered his example, his love, his spirit, his ordinances, his sacrifice, his heaven: every encouragement, to induce us to become good and virtuous. He came to deliver us from sin and its penal consequences, to restore God's original kingdom amongst us, and *purchase to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*<sup>x</sup>. In all this affair, he considers us as moral agents, capable of making a right, or a wrong use of our faculties; of our talents, helps and advantages: he uses no force, denies no gift, withholds no grace, that is necessary to our doing the will of God; so that if our destruction follows, it will appear to result from nothing, but our own negligence, obstinacy and willful abuse of our powers and faculties. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; but men love darkness rather than light. Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life*<sup>y</sup>.—We have then every consideration to engage us to live well; which if we make our earnest study, in all the views of life, we shall neither be ashamed to live, nor afraid to die. We shall act with the conscious approbation of our own minds, and cherish in ourselves, what would be a perpetual spring of comfort, *viz.*  
a lively

<sup>w</sup> Rom. xiv. 18. <sup>x</sup> Tit. ii. 14. <sup>y</sup> John iii. 19. v. 40.

a lively sense of the love and favour of God. And let me say, that even bad men venerate such a life, and when they come to die, then when men judge more impartially and truly, if they have any use of reason, then, *I say*, such men justify the wisdom of being religious; condemn their own conduct, as folly and madness: and review it with penitency and sorrow. *On the contrary*, a life of faith and holiness will never displease us in our serious hours of recollection: never disappoint us in the final issue of things. When other satisfactions will leave us, when the world will fail, and sensual pleasures be no more; virtue will attend us in all conditions in all removes, yea in a change of worlds. Here then is wisdom, worthy our admiration and choice, more valuable than riches, more durable than time, viz. *to fear God, and keep his commandments*<sup>z</sup>. Then when it is said of us, and it will be said in a little time, *they are dead*, it may be added not so much from a charitable supposition, as real evidences of our piety, *they are happy*. — *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as you know, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord*<sup>a</sup>:

<sup>z</sup> Eccles. xii. 13.<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 58.

T H E E N D.